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GRANT ALLEN

By
RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

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GRANT ALLEN.*

I.

Grant Allen has died at a moment when we had most need of him, and at the saddest time for himself. Not unprophetically did he sing:

. . . our grave shall be on the side
Of the Moabite mount.

It is sadder even than that, for to die on the threshold of their promised land is the fate of every advanced dreamer and thinker. Grant Allen has died at a moment when the very vision of that promised land is obscured by every form of reactionary darkness. He lived to see, not indeed the fulfilment of the civilized ideals for which lifelong he did such valiant battle, but the overwhelming triumph of precisely all the opponent ideals which he hated and dreaded with his whole soul. A democrat, he lived to see democracy once more in the dust, and every form of tyranny and snobbery firmer than ever in their seats; a clear-seer and far-thinker, he lived to see every form of superstition re-enthroned, and England seriously dreaming once more of Rome; a citizen-of-the-world, he lived to see race-hatred revived with mediæval fury, and narrow patriotism once more dividing nations; a man of peace, he lived to see civil freedom threatened by a militarism insolent and cruel as the world has ever known. Yes, surely it was a sad moment for Grant Allen to die. A few years before, the outlook had seemed so different, and of all those who were then eagerly lending a hand to the imminent socialistic, philosophic, artistic millennium, none was more effectively eager, or more boyishly hopeful, than Grant Allen. I think it was the indignant reception given to "The

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Woman Who Did" which first opened his eyes to the superficial nature of the imagined "advance" of thought and social ideals in England. We hadn't even gone so far as to give patient hearing to an honest, pure-purposed, though it might be mistaken, thinker. Stones were still regarded as the appropriate reward of the prophets—small stones, indeed, as Dr. Stockmann said in "An Enemy of the People." Minor stones for minor prophets, in a day of small things.

When I last had any long talk with Grant Allen, I had come somewhat dolefully bewailing what we called "the slump in ideas," and I was surprised to find how little comfort he could give me. For once his optimism seemed to have failed him. For that moment he really seemed to have just "given it up"; but his despair characteristically vanished in an instant as, catching sight of a little Alpine flower which, to his great joy, had been persuaded to grow in his hill-top garden, he gathered a blossom and began to discourse in his own fascinating way upon its "honey-guides" and all the wonder of its delicate mechanism. Straightway we had both clean forgotten the Dreyfus case, absorbed together in a flower. In cosmos and microcosmos, in the wonders of what went right in natural law, Grant Allen consoled himself for the marvels of what went wrong in human history. And on this particular occasion I know I had caught him in an off moment, and the malaria with which for some months he had been depressed must be made allowance for in that momentary daunting of his spirit before the gigantic evils of the civilized world. Had I met him an hour or two later, I have no doubt I should have found him once more buoyantly confident of better things. He was too long-sighted, too tenacious of practical melioristic conceptions, to mistake a temporary reaction for permanent defeat. Yet the word "temporary" has not the same consolation for a fighter of fifty as it has for some young combatant in his twenties, who can afford to wait out with a certain complaisance the disappointing ebb of the great wave on which he has set his hopes. "Temporary"—yes! but what is the life of man upon the earth? The tide will, of course, turn. We are only engaged in making the inevitable step

backward before we make two forward—but, what joy when we make them shall they be to Grant Allen? Had his life only been reasonably prolonged, as happily the life of our master-rebel, Mr. George Meredith, has been prolonged, he might have seen the sunlit crest of another mighty wave of freedom. Now he lies in the dark trough between.

II.

Recently, Mr. Frederic Harrison, enumerating the chill accomplishments of the dead, gave more names to knowledge than I dare to remember. He was so many “—ists,” the dead man we loved; but what would they all have mattered had he not been—Grant Allen? The world was always meanly critical of him. The little precious writers were eager to say that he was no writer, the scientists to pick holes in his science, the philosophers to smile at his “Force and Energy.” There was nothing he set himself to do, but some small-souled thing of a critic would have his little sneer. Through all, however, he had the courage to go on being—Grant Allen. Others might be more this, or greater that. Science has its tiny grammarians, its old-maidish pedants, no less than literature,—men who can no more see a generalization than the eye of a fly can take in a mountain. Such flies, bred in the backyards of every science or art, buzzed all his life round the head of Grant Allen. For the most part he was too absorbed in the work he had to do, to notice them; and, when occasionally they did sting him—he just forgot it.

Of science, I know no more than one foredoomed to the practice of literature cannot escape knowing in an age of science. Grant Allen smiled when he gave me long ago a copy of “Force and Energy”—as well he might. I read it hard, because he gave it to me, and there are one or two additional lines in my brow to this day to witness that I speak the truth. All that remains to me is a somewhat shaky idea of two very rudimentary definitions, the two school-boy definitions of energy. One I know is potential, and the other is kinetic, but, for the life of me, I cannot say, at this distance

of time, which is which! I'm afraid I console myself with a very shadowy respect for abstract thinking. I wouldn't part with my copy of "Force and Energy" for any inducement; but that, I fear, is on account of a simple human verse Grant Allen wrote in it as he gave it me. I knew he would think no less of me because I barely knew what the book was about. He was one of those rare men to whom one may safely tell the truth, the truth of one's ignorance. Knowing more than most men who know much, knowledge was with him no superstition. He could respect an inspired ignorance when he met it! I need not parade the various forms of knowledge upon Grant Allen's acquirements, in which I am singularly unqualified to give an opinion. How speak of him as a botanist when all I know of flowers—out of Shakespeare—I learned by looking through that little pocket microscope, so well known to his friends, which he used constantly to twirl and twirl between his finger and thumb as he talked, and without which I really think he could not have talked at all. I have seen him stop in the middle of a sentence as he momentarily lost hold of it, and then once more go on flowingly as he had it twirling again—like the boy in Scott's class at school, whose memory seemed to be located in a certain button of his waistcoat, which he gripped confidently as his turn to answer questions came round. Scott, noting this, cut off the button; and, thus robbed of his mnemonic stay, the hapless leader of his class toppled and fell. Scott took his place, a place never regained; and his life-long remorse at the incident is well known to readers of the autobiography. No one was ever cruel enough to rob Grant Allen of his mnemonic microscope, though I confess that my fingers often came near to it. Now, I wonder if his memory lived in that little optical toy, as the soul of the great chief in "The Great Taboo" lived in the mistletoe branch of the sacred tree. Will it pass to the next inheritor of the sad little microscope? If so, what an inheritance! For one of the many remarkable things about Grant Allen was the prodigious range and accuracy and instantaneous readiness of his memory. This was so proverbial amongst his friends that one of the dearest of them coined the phrase, "We must look it up

in Grant," and in his whimsical way he once discussed the scheme of abandoning literature and setting up as a peripatetic encyclopedia, a modern Camerarius, a sort of general call-office of knowledge.

But it was not so much the extent of his knowledge as his manner of imparting it, which was one of the many personal gifts of a liberally-gifted personality. Dull slaves of knowledge, pedants whose one gift, after industry, is the power of making interesting things dull, naturally try to cheapen the power of making dull things interesting. They call it "popularizing." Whenever a man with the gift of vivid, illustrative expression gets hold of some subject hitherto monopolized by specialists hooting to each other in dark technicalities, and makes it clear and operative for the average intelligent human being, the process is belittled as "popularizing."

When any one has written history in a readable form,—as say Macaulay, Froude, and Green,—they are said to "popularize" history. They are not dull enough to be trustworthy. Of course, the cry has been raised from the remotest time. Dante heard it in his day, when he dared to mould to a literary use a vernacular tongue. The first men who wrote serious scientific and philosophic treatises in any language but Latin—they heard it. The men who turned the Bible into English and German—didn't they hear it? O this dreadful "popularization" of hidden knowledge, which only the bats and owls of university libraries were born to!

To some such chorus Grant Allen "popularized" science. He made it clear, he made it simple, he made it interesting, he made it positively romantic; for he was more even than an apt exponent, he was no little of a poet, and those who see nothing in such books as his "Evolutionist at Large," "Colin Clout's Calendar," "Vignettes from Nature," "Moorland Idylls," but clear statement and luminous exposition, do scant justice to a rare literary gift exercising itself not merely with expository skill, but also artistically, upon difficult new material. More than clearness of statement was needed. Some of the dullest of writers are as clear as they are dry. Grant Allen's individual clearness came of imagination, as his

charm came of an illustrative fancy, and a gay humanity applied to subjects usually immured from traffic with such frivolous qualities. Thus he not only made knowledge delightful to know, but delightful to read. In short, he gave us something like literary equivalents of his subjects. His essays were not always flowers and butterflies, but they often were, and certainly they were such flowers and butterflies as gladden but seldom the volcanic rocks of science.

Mere clearness of statement—I said just now. I beg to withdraw the suspicion of depreciation in the phrase; for the æsthetic charm of a really masterly clearness of statement is one which qualifies for high literary honors. There was a time in all our lives when we used to say that Pope was no poet—because, I suppose, he is not all sensual adjectives. A friend who had realized before me the poetry of thought clearly and rhythmically expressed long ago cured me of that. So latterly with prose, the beautiful triumphs of the musical, decorative school—De Quincey, Pater, Stevenson—have made us think of prose too much as though it were merely a Morris wall-paper. Let it be a Morris wall-paper by all means, but let it remain everything else it can efficiently be as well. Bacon's "Essays" entirely depend for their endurance on their clearness of statement.

Now, judged merely by a literary standard, valued merely as expression which is capable of taking hold of a complex, debatable subject, and treating it clearly, completely, and charmingly, though from an unfamiliar, even startling, standpoint, I would venture to make a high claim for some papers which Grant Allen probably thought comparatively little of, and any one of which he most likely dashed off on his supernatural typewriter under the hour. I mean those explosive nutshells of what one might call prophetic thinking, first contributed to the "Westminster Gazette" and since collected into a volume under the title of "Post-Prandial Philosophy." If any modern English writer has matched these little "journalistic" essays in swift thinking and swift statement, has packed so much mind in so small a capsule of printed matter, and has, at the same time, contrived to give so personal an accent of

charm—or power of producing furious irritation (the result of charm applied to the wrong reader)—to his spare, hard-worked, under-manned, two thousand words—I think it can only be Grant Allen under still another of those pseudonyms in which he felt it only decent to drape the fruitfulness of his abounding muse.

Grant Allen was one of those instructive writers who write best when they think least about it,—when, so to speak, they forget they are writing. It was not natural to him to work self-consciously, like prose writers such as Pater and Stevenson. He wrote best when he wrote as he talked, fired with interest for the thing he had to express, and concerned only to state it as clearly and adequately as possible. Curiously enough, in the modesty of his mind it never seemed to occur to him that this was his native way of being an artist in words. Such things as the “Post-Prandial Philosophy” he regarded as all in the day’s work, and prided himself rather on these occasional experiments in the more conscious and more traditional “literary” methods, where there is no doubt he was least successful. I remember, during another talk I had with him not long before he died, we chanced to speak of a recent criticism of one of his books, highly appreciative in the main, but including the remark that Mr. Allen wrote nowadays a little more hastily than formerly—though what wonder when one considered his enormous productiveness, etc.

Grant Allen, who seldom saw any criticisms of his writings, and refrained purposely from subscribing to any press-cutting agency, was pleased with the review—but he laughed good-humoredly at the statement that he wrote less carefully than formerly. “Why!” he said, “I take ten times the pains. Look here!” and he darted off to his study with one of his long, eager strides, and brought out a type-written manuscript. “Look here!” he said, “does this look like carelessness?” The type-writing was like a moving ant-hill with minute innumerable corrections in his exquisite, small hand. Of course, I didn’t say that I regretted these evidences of a growing self-consciousness in his writing, and that the old, swift, nail-on-the-head “carelessness” was best.

There are, need one say, as many ideals of literary style as there are real writers. The style Grant Allen was born to, the style that was the man himself and no other, belonged to a method of style which we are apt to regard as peculiarly modern, but which in reality is as old as any other—the style founded on talk, the colloquial style, so called, though the word “colloquial” has become too suggestive of a certain confidential unction in a writer to allow the phrase to be used with safety. It is a style which does not readily lend itself to quotation. Its *métier* is not the purple passage. I have been looking through “Post-Prandial Philosophy” to see if I can find a passage which may, without too much loss of blood, be severed from its life-giving context, in illustration of the spirited direct way of writing in which I conceive Grant Allen to have been at his best. Really, the illustration is inadequate, for these little papers are, in their comparatively modest way, as complete and organic as sonnets. However, there is one, “About Abroad,” which may endure the vivisection, and at the same time provide us with a characteristic example of Grant Allen’s way of looking at things.

The place known as Abroad is not nearly so nice a country to live in as England. The people who inhabit Abroad are called Foreigners. They are in every way and at all times inferior to Englishmen. These Post-Prandials used once to be provided with a sting in their tail, like the common scorpion. By way of change, I turn them out now with a sting in their head, like the common mosquito. Mosquitoes are much less dangerous than scorpions, but they’re a deal more irritating. Not that I am sanguine enough to expect I shall irritate Englishmen. . . . To most Englishmen, the world divides itself naturally into two unequal and non-equivalent portions—Abroad and England. Of these two, Abroad is much the larger country; but England, though smaller, is vastly more important. Abroad is inhabited by Frenchmen and Germans, who speak their own foolish and chattering languages. Part of it is likewise pervaded by Chinamen, who wear pigtailed; and the outlying districts belong to the poor heathen, chiefly interesting as a field of missionary enterprise, and a possible market for Manchester piece-goods. . . . If you ask most people what has become of Tom, they will answer at once with the specific information, “Oh, Tom has gone Abroad.” I have one stereotyped rejoinder to an answer like that—“What part of Abroad, please?” That usually stumps them. Abroad is abroad; and, like the gentleman who was asked in examination to “name the minor prophets,” they decline to make invidious distinctions. It is nothing to them whether he is tea-planting in the Himalayas, or sheep-farming in Australia, or orange-growing in Florida, or ranching in Colorado. If he is not in England, why then he is elsewhere; and elsewhere is Abroad, and is indivisible. . . .

People will tell you, "Foreigners do this ; " " Foreigners do that ; " " Foreigners smoke so much ; " " Foreigners always take coffee for breakfast." " Indeed," I love to answer, " I've never observed it myself in Central Asia."

Would it surprise you to learn that most people live in Asia ? Would it surprise you to learn that most people are poor benighted heathen, and that, of the remainder, most people are Mahomedans, and that, of the Christians, who come next, most people are Roman Catholics, and that, of the other Christian sects, most people belong to the Greek Church, and that, last of all, we get Protestants, more particularly Anglicans, Wesleyans, Baptists ? Have you ever really realized the startling fact that England is an island off the coast of Europe ? that Europe is a peninsula at the end of Asia ? that France, Germany, Italy, are the fringe of Russia ? Have you ever really realized that the English-speaking race lives mostly in America ? that the country is vastly more populous than London ? that our class is the froth and scum of society ? Think these things out, and try to measure them on the globe. And when you speak of Abroad, do please specify what part of it.

This, I submit, is very good writing ; and, like all good writing, very pleasant writing. Its interest for us does not end in the delivery of its message. It is a pleasure to read for its own sake—for the unmistakable sound of a man's voice behind it, one man's voice and no other's, the sense of nearness it brings across the page to a forcible, thinking, humorous, really *human* human being. It is not only clever, it is good writing, in the true sense of the word. You may see little in it to wonder at. I never said it was wonderful, or great. Writing, like men and women, need not be great to be good. But this I will hazard, that such " mere journalistic " writing, backed by a personality such as Grant Allen's, is more likely to engage the attention of that much-courted tribunal, posterity, than the sugar-candy euphuism, the imitation Stevenson, which passes for high art in the moment, and towards which Grant Allen, in the innocence of his heart, used sometimes, I know, to cast longing eyes. Of course, the passage I have quoted is only an illustration in little of a style which Grant Allen wielded no less successfully on a broader canvas and with a fuller brush. Probably the fullest, most masterly writing he ever achieved is contained in the numerous articles which he contributed to the " Fortnightly Review." These articles will, no doubt, be collected some day. Those relating to anthropology and folk-lore have already been worked into his book on " The Evolution of the Idea of

God." Readers in England—of course, I mean "popular" readers—who are unfortunate enough to think somewhat in advance of their fellows, owe more than perhaps they remember to those stimulating germinal articles in which Grant Allen earliest and most successfully sowed the dragon's teeth which produced him such a plentiful crop of those armed men, the critics. And in one of those articles, particularly, one which necessarily subjected him to their blindest misunderstanding,—I refer to "The New Hedonism,"—he came nearest, I think, to fulfilling that wistfully-held ideal of decorative prose to which I have made reference. What a tapestry can be made out of sheer knowledge, this passage, I think, successfully illustrates :

Not otherwise is it with the beauty that appeals to the eye. Every lovely object in organic nature owes its loveliness direct to sexual selection. The whole æsthetic sense in animals had this for its origin. Every spot on the feathery wings of butterflies was thus produced ; every eye on the gorgeous, glancing plumage of the peacock. The bronze and golden beetles, the flashing blue of the dragon-fly, the brilliant colors of tropical moths, the lamp of the glow-worm, the gleaming light of the fire-fly in the thicket, spring from the same source. The infinite variety of crest and gorget among the iridescent humming-birds ; the glow of the trogon, the barbets among the palm-blossoms ; the exquisite plumage of the birds of paradise ; the ball-and-socket ornament of the argus pheasant ; the infinite hues of parrot and macaw ; the strange bill of the gaudy toucan, and the crimson wattles of the turkey, still tell one story. The sun-birds deck themselves for their courtship in ruby and topaz, in chrysoprase and sapphire. Even the antlers of deer, the twisted horns of antelopes, and the graceful forms or dappled coats of so many other mammals have been developed in like manner by sexual selection. The very fish in the sea show similar results of æsthetic preferences. The butterfly fins of the gurnard and the courting colors of the stickleback have but one explanation. . . . Even the basis of the dance, and, therefore, to a great extent of the lyric, poetic, and dramatic faculty, is closely bound up in like manner with the choice in pairing. The minuets of the blackcock, the aerial antics of the peewit, the meeting-places and ball-rooms of so many grouse and other game-birds, the strutting of the peacock, the display of the argus pheasant, the coquetting of butterflies, the strange courtship of spiders. . . .

A little more self-conscious art, a little less ethical enthusiasm, could have made a little more of the material,—such material of strangely shaped and colored words as "trogon," and "barbet," and "toucan,"—but merely to bring together, in the inspiration of argument rather than art, so many short

clauses, each containing at least one purple or orange name, stimulating to the imagination either by strangeness or familiarity, was no small literary success.

One more quotation I shall make, again illustrative of Grant Allen's occasional success in what I daresay he would have called "the higher style," a passage in which for once he dropped the irony which was his usual manner, and allowed the aspiration of his heart, the simple sincerity of his hope, to escape in a passage of eloquent pleading, through which blows the keen sweet air one of the purest of recent lives could alone breathe. It is from the preface to his least fortunate book, his second "hill-top novel," "The British Barbarians":

I am writing in my study on a heather-clad hill-top. When I raise my eye from my sheet of foolscap, it falls upon miles and miles of broad, open moorland. My window looks out upon unsullied nature. Everything around is fresh, and pure, and wholesome. Through the open casement the scent of the pines blows in with the breeze from the neighboring firwood. Keen airs sigh through the pine-needles. Grasshoppers chirp from deep tangles of bracken. The song of a skylark drops from the sky like soft rain in summer; in the evening, a night-jar croons to us his monotonously passionate love-wail, from his perch on the gnarled boughs of the wind-swept larch that crowns the upland. But away below in the valley, as night draws on, a lurid glare reddens the north-eastern horizon. It marks the spot where the great wen of London heaves and festers. Up here on the freer hills the sharp air blows in upon us, limpid and clear from a thousand leagues of open ocean; down there in the crowded town it stagnates and ferments, polluted with the diseases and vices of centuries. . . . Far, far below, the theatre and the music-hall spread their garish gas-lamps. Let who will heed them. But here on the open hill-top we know fresher and more wholesome delights. Those feverish joys allure us not. O decadents of the town, we have seen your sham idyls, your tinsel Arcadias. We have tired of their stuffy atmosphere, their dazzling jets, their weary ways, their gaudy dresses; we shun the sunken cheeks, the lack-lustre eyes, the heart-sick souls of your painted goddesses. . . . Your halls are too stifling with carbonic acid gas; for us, we breathe oxygen. . . . How we smile, we who live here, when some dweller in the mists and smoke of the valley confounds our delicate atmosphere, redolent of honey, and echoing the manifold murmur of bees, with that stifling miasma of the gambling hell and the dancing saloon! Trust me, dear friend, the moorland air is far other than you fancy. You can wander up here along the purple ridges, hand locked in hand with those you love, without fear of harm to yourself or your comrade. No Bloom of Ninon here, but fresh cheeks like the peach-blossom where the sun has kissed it; no casual fruition of loveless, joyless harlots, but life-long saturation of your own heart's desire in your own heart's innocence. Ozone is better than all the champagne in the Strand or Piccadilly. If only you will believe it, it is

purity, and life, and sympathy, and vigor. Its perfect freshness and perpetual fount of youth keep your age from withering. It crimson the sunset, and lives in the afterglow. If these delights thy mind may move, leave, oh, leave the meretricious town, and come to the airy peaks.

III.

These quotations illustrate not merely Grant Allen's talent for literary expression, but they may stand, too, as illustrations of the kind of thought he best cared to express, and the temper in which he strove to express it. Grant Allen was one of those whom an inscrutable Providence creates Englishmen (I know, of course, technically he was Irish-French-Canadian) for the express purpose of their differing on every conceivable question with their fellow-countrymen. This is one of the many ways in which England is seen to be in the peculiar care of the invisible powers. Perhaps the soil of no other nation is so richly fertilized with the martyred remains of its artists and thinkers. Grant Allen was one of those true patriots who do their country the great service of differing from it on every possible occasion. Was there any subject on which Grant Allen agreed with England—or any subject on which England agreed with Grant Allen? I suppose one might, with diligence, find one or two. Read, for example, those "Plain Words on the Woman Question," in Number 274 (October, 1889) of the "Fortnightly Review," and you will find him ten years ago vigorously sounding that anti-Malthusian alarm which Zola has set to mighty drums in "Fécondité," a book of which, one hears, England has as yet no need. Yet, let it by all means be allowed that Grant Allen was at variance with his country on most other questions. He was a Home-Ruler; a Socialist, an "Atheist" (so called), and (in theory) a "Free-Lover"—everything but a house-breaker. I could think of nothing worse to say of him were I *advocatus diaboli*. O yes! there is some fear that he was a Little Englander. But there are differences which, like certain bombs, explode; and there are differences which fall softly in the grass of oblivion, and are forgotten. England now takes socialism and atheism (long since respectable as "agnosticism") quite calmly. The Home-Ruler and the

Little Englander it keeps alive because political meetings must have something to play with. But—Free Love!! An evil and adulterous generation naturally takes that seriously. Grant Allen was at liberty to call London a "squalid village," or to plump down any of his delicious paradoxes, such as: "We Celts henceforth will rule the roost in Britain"; he might protest against preserved partridges, or say what he pleased about *the* aristocracy; but, when it came to suggesting that a notoriously painful marriage law was capable of improvement,—a marriage law which necessitates the expensive safety-valve of the divorce court,—ah! then indeed Grant Allen sinned the sin for which there is no forgiveness between the North and the Irish seas. Lord Rosebery recently described us with pathetic pathos as a little island floating lonely (and unprotected) in these northern seas, or something similarly pretty; so, indeed, we float, very lonely, on such an important question as the comfortable (merely comfortable) relation of man and woman. In all that relates to that we are only less civilized than the unspeakably English Turk. We may, indeed, as Mr. Meredith brilliantly said, have passed Seraglio Point, but certainly we have not rounded Cape Turk.

Grant Allen felt this limitation on the part of his countrymen with the acuteness of a sincere and melioristic mind, as two much greater novelists, Mr. Meredith and Mr. Hardy, not to speak of any number of great poets, had felt it before him, and he determined to do what he could do to advance a saner ideal. Thus he wrote "The Woman Who Did."

Grant Allen regarded this as the most important book he ever wrote. Perhaps, after all, he was right. I didn't think so when I first read it; for it is quite certain that, technically speaking, it is far from being his best novel; nor, well and sometimes beautifully written, is it the best—that is, the most individually—written of his books. A book, however, may be a bad novel, it may be indifferently written; and yet it may be an important book. "Robert Elsmere" was, for England, an important book. "Degeneration," for all its absurdities, was an important book. Neither book was "lit-

erature," nor science, nor anything that mattered artistically or anyway technically. Each book was merely a *poster*—a poster, a vivid advertising shock announcing new ideas; that is, not brand-new ideas, not ideas that had never been heard of before (for where shall we find those in historic times?), but ideas practically untried upon large areas of mankind, towards the trial of which the spirit of the age seemed blindly to be pushing. Its very title declared "The Woman Who Did" to be a poster of rebellion; and, as such, it was a remarkably conspicuous success—for, as I said on its publication, the story was nought, the characters were puppets, a philosopher's puppets; yet, so momentous was the moral idea it advertised, so single-minded and pure-of-heart was the motive enthusiasm of the man who wrote it, that it sold as though it had been some really interesting romance by Miss Marie Corelli or Mr. Hall Caine.

I do it, and certainly intend it, no disrespect, when I speak of it as the advertisement of an idea. There is nothing that ideas need so much as advertisement. Grant Allen always had this happy knack, by the sheer innocence of his almost childlike sincerity, of attracting, or shall I say, repelling, immediate attention for any cause he cared to espouse. His lightest phrase sounded a gong which summoned his fellow-countrymen to put out with all their might the fire he had just kindled. It mattered little what it was he talked of. He could not avoid making the poster phrase, the poster word. If you seriously want to save the world, you have first got to make the world hear, and secondly, make the world throw stones. Grant Allen had a really enviable faculty of provoking the world to throw stones. He was like a great speaker. However unruly his audience, he had but to raise a finger of audacious phrase, and, whatever happened afterwards, he was *heard*. Take a long-since tranquil theme, such as the poetry of Mr. William Watson. James Ashcroft Noble knew it almost before it was born; he wrote of it, persuasively as he could write, in important journals, such as the "Academy" and the "Spectator." At one time Hutton seemed to edit the "Spectator" for the very proper purpose of announcing the

truly momentous presence in our midst of the author of "Wordsworth's Grave." The present writer was reciting it with inconsiderate proselytism quite ten years ago. Yet the "National Review," in which it appeared, passed virtually unnoticed, save by the little band who looked out for it, knowing it was to appear. An unappreciated genius, Mr. Watson wandered unrecognized on the Yorkshire moors. Then Grant Allen took up his speaking trumpet, modestly enough, indeed, as he always did, and said: "Let there be William Watson," and there was William Watson. Small critics, who knew as little of the poet as they knew of his trumpeter, said: What does Grant Allen know about poetry? Grant Allen, the "popularizer" of science, the self-confessed manufacturer of shoddy fiction. But Grant Allen had blown his trumpet, that "coarse" trumpet of his, and England—including Lord Rosebery—heard. Of course, Mr. Watson had been no less a poet though Grant Allen had never spoken, just as Armenia had been Armenia though "The Purple East" had never been written; but it is, after all, a pleasant thing to be recognized as William Watson a little ahead of posterity's finding it out, and I am sure Mr. Watson remembers with gratitude that the noble, forcible, and fascinating personality of Grant Allen was once enthusiastically his very effective poster.

Similarly, in regard to "The Woman Who Did": the ethical motive was, of course, familiar enough—old as Shelley, old as the hills. A year or two before its publication Mr. Meredith had published, in "Lord Ormont and his Aminta," the sympathetic drama of similar revolt, but the Conservative Press which upholds the world—like the tortoise in Buddhist cosmogony—had not fallen about his ears. Mr. Meredith's style is a coat of mail which protects the most innovating idea. But there was a deeper reason than that. England dreads the abstract; give it plain, common-sense, concrete adultery, and it will forgive and forget. But of abstract "adultery"—adultery from the highest ethical motives—it is suspicious. And, of course, in a sense it is right. To break a law is one thing, to set up that law-breaking as a new law is another. Of course, in "Lord

Ormont and his Aminta" Mr. Meredith did that very thing. But then you can esoterically exhibit law-breaking art in the protective obscurity of, say, The Dudley Gallery, which would provoke a storm of comment if placarded, say, at the Strand entrance to Waterloo Bridge. So much depends on where the nude in truth is hung. "Lord Ormont and his Aminta" was a warm human exception—in spite of its author intending to make a new rule; "The Woman Who Did" announced an aggressive new rule. It possessed no humanity to excuse it. It sought no excuse. It was intended as a challenge, and its success was that it was accepted as such. That it should be furiously attacked was a part of that success; otherwise there had been no necessity to write it. In form a novel, in reality it belongs to our noble series of change-demanding pamphlets. As literature it has small value; as a brilliant noise on behalf of human progress it means a great deal.

Perhaps it were as well to explain that, while in the abstract I agreed with Grant Allen's theory on this matter long before I knew Grant Allen,—in fact, just after I met with Shelley!—later experience of life has led me to doubt its practical, working efficiency. Indeed, I am venturesome, superstitious, old-fashioned enough to wonder if, at all events for certain natures, there is not a more radical criticism to be made of those theories. Let us allow that there are happy natures constituted in the light of reason who can love according to the law which Grant Allen summarizes in this neat quatrain :

I hold that heart full poor that owns its boast
To throb in tune with but one throbbing breast.
Who numbers many friends, loves friendship most;
Who numbers many loves, loves each love best.

I, too, thought so once, but I have come to realize that what Grant Allen meant by love is not in the real sense—that is, the absurd, the tragic, the comic, the mystic sense—love at all. He really spoke of a sort of sexual comradeship. Love is something far more terrible. It has nothing whatever to do with reason, nothing to do with theories. It burns this way, it burns that. But the flame it sets alight is for one martyr, it is kindled by one torch.

Indeed, as I ventured sometimes to tell him, there is something in human life, in human nature, which I think Grant Allen rather missed; something mystic, something divinely and devilishly irrational which he did not take into account in his melioristic dreams. Of course, it is the way of all moralists, and Grant Allen was a moralist, *par excellence*. Packed full of humanity himself, he never realized what one can only call the elaborate waywardness of human nature. He thought of humanity too much in the abstract. He thought of it as composed of human beings amenable to reason, ductible to ideals. Being himself a nature singularly adaptable to the influence of right thinking, he imagined that the rest of the world was like him. Of course he knew, but in his utopianism he hardly remembered sufficiently, that the influence of ideas on humanity is exceedingly slow and laborious and indeed superficial. To see the right was with him to do it. To see the wrong in his own nature was at least to struggle to set it right. His, in fact, was a nature singularly conformable to moral ideas. But average human nature is not. It sees the right, but its warm life-forces compel it to do the wrong. As Grant Allen once wittily said of a friend, humanity "longs to be a saint, but it loves to be a sinner."

I think it was this in Grant Allen which closed his eyes to the beauty of London. The beauty of London, if one may say so, is the beauty of a richly-colored meerschaum. It smells rankly of old romantic sin. With its freakish rings of rich brown, it is, side by side with a nice clean new meerschaum, a disgrace. Life has had its way with it, and it is colored accordingly. Now, I think I do him no wrong when I say that Grant Allen rather loved the new meerschaum. I don't *think* he would have cared much to live, say, in an old historic house. At every turn it would have reminded him of wrong thinking, of crushing social wrong. He could never have slept in it. The "monopolist instincts" would have shrieked about his bed at night. He loved the beauty of new-made things, life washed clean in the dawn; and I am far from implying that he was anything but right in so doing. The beauty of antiquity was, I imagine, to his way of think-

ing, partly dirt and partly superstition: of course, I mean mere age,—that is, the humanization which comes to anything through mere use. I am hardly writing for a reader who needs to be told of his appreciation, his exceptionally intuitive interpretation, of the definitely, demonstrably, beautiful things of antiquity. His knowledge of and insight into the Italian painters of the Renaissance is well-known, and I have had few more fascinating experiences than hearing him expound his original interpretation of the symbolism of, say, Botticelli's "Primavera,"—a picture, indeed, sufficiently hackneyed to provide opportunity for a *tour de force* of original exposition.

The fact remains that Grant Allen loved human ideals more than human realities—as, indeed, we all should do, but don't. This ideality accounts for the unreality—as fiction—of such books as "The Woman Who Did"; but, at the same time, it is nothing against their usefulness as brilliant and forcible social tracts. To write a really influential tract—well, what novel since that lovely tract of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" is worth mentioning beside such an achievement?

IV.

I am thus insidiously led up to Grant Allen's novels without a purpose. Of these I propose to say little—for a good reason. On entering into friendship with Grant Allen it was obligatory to make one promise only,—never, under whatsoever temptation, to read one of his "commercial" novels. I feel myself no little unworthy as I think that my poor human nature proved incapable of strictly fulfilling this condition. And, indeed, I must not forget Grant Allen made one exception: "For Maimie's Sake." This was an earlier illustration of "The Woman Who Did" idea; and, though there is much that Grant Allen wrote that I prefer to it, I admit that in "Maimie" he outlined a type of original interest, and indeed created the only living woman in his books. For, indeed, in no study so much as that of woman would his passion for the abstract so absolutely unfit him to arrive at reality. Man may be imperfectly amenable to rule, but every woman is an exception. Woman, indeed, *is* human nature.

I once meditated an appreciation of Grant Allen's "pot-boilers," which only accident prevented my carrying out; and I'm afraid, unintentionally indeed, I hurt him by saying that his current "pot-boiler," "Under Sealed Orders," was a much better novel than "The Woman Who Did." Some day I may fulfil my old intention, and I think I should not find it difficult to prove that Grant Allen was a far better novelist than he had the smallest interest in being.

As a teller of the short story he is admitted, among those who know, to have been a brilliant pioneer. It was an appropriate coincidence that very shortly before his death he should have published a selection of twelve of the most important of his tales, with a characteristic confession of how he came to be a story-teller at all. Of course, he was a born story-teller; but, as all gifts are the revelation of accident, it was the accident of his having thrown a scientific idea into the form of a story that revealed Grant Allen's story-telling both to himself and to the world. His best stories always bore the mark of this accidental origin. They were always the illustration of some scientific or moral conceptions,—from the famous "Reverend John Creedy" to "The Woman Who Did." But their success was that they lost nothing in narrative interest on that account. "The Child of the Phalanstery," "Ivan Greet's Masterpiece," are both, so to speak, allegorical in intention; but, all the same, they hold and move one just as if they were the simplest emotional stories, and not in the least the attractive envelope of an ethical pill. Besides, sheerly as story-telling, some of Grant Allen's stories qualify him as an inventor. "The Reverend John Creedy," "Mr. Chung," and many other such stories, justify his timid enough claim to be one of the earliest writers of "the romance of the clash of civilizations." He used sometimes to say that, mis-spent as his life had been, he was the maker of the phrase: "gone Fantee." With touching humility, in the preface to that collection of "Twelve Tales" just referred to, he mentions with characteristic (let one say for him, absurd) deference "the Kiplings," the "Wellses": "I shall be amply content if our masters permit me to pick up the crumbs that fall from the

table of the Hardys, the Kiplings, the Merediths, and the Wellses."

I have nothing to say to "the Hardys" and "the Merediths," except to protest against a somewhat hasty use of the plural. But "the Kiplings" and "the Wellses"! Well, I kow-tow (as Grant Allen would say) to those brilliant writers with all my heart; but to be able to tell a tale better than Grant Allen—that is, to go one better than one's tutor—does not prove one a more important person than Grant Allen. "No talent can be supremely effective," said that very clear-sighted observer, George Henry Lewes, "unless it act in close alliance with certain moral qualities." "Art" is only of supreme importance when it is either the embodiment of that beauty which is the final unquestionable holiness, or when it is the voice of the universal absolutes of man. To be "diabolically clever" is not the same thing. To cinematograph the past, or to cinematograph the present, is nothing like so important as—to pray with all your heart for the future. Prayer is usually allowed to be exempt from minor æsthetic criticism.

And this leads me to speak of a little volume which must certainly not go uncelebrated here, and which in the whole enormous library of Grant Allen's writings has a more important place than has yet been allowed to it, or than he himself would have claimed for it,—the little volume of his poems quaintly entitled: "The Lower Slopes, Reminiscences of Excursions round the Base of Helicon, undertaken for the most part in early manhood." If it contained no other poem than this striking "Prayer," it would have a sufficient *raison d'être*:

A crowned Caprice is god of this world;
On his stony breast are his white wings furled.
No ear to listen, no eye to see,
No heart to feel for a man hath he.

But his pitiless arm is swift to smite;
And his mute lips utter one word of might,
'Mid the clash of gentler souls and rougher,
"Wrong must thou do, or wrong must suffer."
Then grant, O dumb, blind god, at least that we
Rather the sufferers than the doers be.

I was glad to see that Mr. Lang in a beautiful, so to say playfully elegiac, article *a propos* Grant Allen's death, referred to him as "a sad good Christian." I too had ventured to write that, like Shelley, he was all his life a Christian without knowing it. Certainly his nature was filled with a pity which in the depth of its tenderness was distinctively "Christian." His favorite motto was: "Self-development is greater than self-sacrifice"; but, when one remembers the deliberate way in which he sacrificed all his literary and scientific dreams to the domestic ideal, and preached constantly in his stories that a man with a wife and children must be husband or father first and artist afterwards, one realizes that, when his abstract theories were put to the human test, Grant Allen considered first the human need in the situation and last of all his theories. Moralist as he was, he was far indeed from being a doctrinaire.

Recently re-reading some of his old articles in the "Fortnightly Review," I came upon a characteristic touch of his pity in a quaintly unexpected place,—a review of Stevenson's "Travels with a Donkey." Grant Allen was even then generously "discovering" other people. It is to be feared that the jesting thanks of one of his *protégées* too often came true: "Need I say that you have earned my blackest ingratitude"? "There is many a true word spoken in jest," was Grant Allen's quiet comment on the occasion. But, to return to Stevenson, after praising the book for its various now classical qualities, Grant Allen concludes thus: "Nevertheless, since one cannot wholly divorce oneself from the ethical feeling of one's age, I must confess that I should have liked Mr. Stevenson better if he had beaten his donkey less unmercifully, and, above all, if he had not used that wooden goad, with its eighth of an inch of pin. This is not the place to discuss the broad question of 'no morality in art'; but most Englishmen will perhaps feel pained rather than amused by the description of poor Modestine's many stripes, or of her foreleg 'no better than raw beef on the inside.'" Grant Allen was unlike his younger contemporaries in being unable to enjoy cruelty. He could not enjoy cruelty in any form, not even in a book.

Why should a sob
 For the vaguest smart
 One moment throb
 Through the tiniest heart?

he indignantly exclaims in a poem in which, *a propos* a moth in a candle flame, he arraigns the devil of pain in the universe.

Mr. Lang has spoken of Grant Allen as "a master of the ballade," and, to illustrate how successfully he could wield the more stately measures of English verse, I may quote these two verses from his fine Arnoldian meditation, "In Magdalen Tower":

This very tree, whose life is our life's sister,
 We know not if the ichor in her veins
 Thrill with fierce joy when April dews have kissed her
 Or shrink in anguish from October rains.
 We search the mighty world above and under,
 Yet nowhere find the soul we fain would find,
 Speech in the hollow rumbling of the thunder,
 Words in the whispering wind.

We yearn for brotherhood with lake and mountain,
 Our conscious soul seeks conscious sympathy,
 Nymphs in the coppice, Naiads in the fountain,
 Gods on the craggy height and roaring sea.
 We find but soulless sequences of matter,
 Fact linked to fact by adamantine rods,
 Eternal bonds of former sense and latter,
 Dead laws for living gods.

Grant Allen's, too, was the happy characterization of Fitzgerald's Omar as "This rose of Iran on an English stock." But I must quote no more from a little book which easily proves that Grant Allen, while he was, what is still more important, a poet in the larger sense, in temperament, in prose, was also a skilful and forcible poet in verse.

V.

In fact, he was, perhaps, the most variously gifted man of letters of his time. Sheerly as a literary workman he can seldom have been equalled. His capacity for working under every disadvantage of circumstance was almost superhuman;

as his obedient adaptability to the demands of the public or the publishers by whom he had to live was as astonishing as it was tragic. When, to his surprise, as he tells in his preface to the "Twelve Tales" already referred to, Mr. Chatto asked him to write stories, he characteristically tells how: "Not a little surprised at this request, I sat down like an obedient workman, and tried to write one at my employer's bidding."

Similarly, on a larger scale, when Sir George Newnes offered a thousand pounds for a sensational novel, he produced "What's Bred in the Bone" with cynical cleverness. That a man of his calibre should have been compelled thus to prostitute gifts so important, however brave and laughing a face he put upon it, is one of the saddest things in recent literary history, as it is eloquent once more of the cruel indifference to the arduous conditions of literary creation in a country which, nevertheless, plumes itself particularly upon its noble literature. But that he was *able* to do it so brilliantly will, doubtless, be the feature of the case which will most fill the down-trodden literary mind with envy.

In the mere mechanical—but how important—matter of "turning out" his "copy" he was quite amazing. Any one who has stayed in his house will remember how his type-writer could be heard as you crossed the hall, punctually beginning to click at nine every morning, and, if you eaves-dropped, you would seldom note a pause in its rapid clicking. I don't think that Grant Allen can even once in his life have "stopped for a word." Interruptions made no difference. I have known him stop in the middle of a sentence at the sound of the luncheon gong, and then, having found on repairing to the dining-room that the gong was a little premature, go back to his type-writer and finish the sentence and begin another. Like all men who do much in this world, he had a genius for using up remnants of time. He had, too, an almost Gladstonian power of concentration. Whatever was going on, he could write if he had made up his mind to. I think that the only thing that ever worried him was a picture askew or a pot out of its place. He couldn't be happy till he had set that

right. Otherwise, however, most things could happen without their interfering with the strong current of his thought bent on expressing itself. One reminiscence to the point I always recall when I think of him in this connection. Some five years ago I was domiciled in his house for many weeks. I was there because Grant Allen and his brave and beautiful wife had taken to heart a private sorrow of mine, with a personal sympathy such as few friends are capable of. There were days when I didn't feel quite equal to the journalism I had undertaken to do; and I remember that on one of them Grant Allen offered to write a brief review for me. If I remember rightly, the book was that which first revealed to us the charming personality of Miss Fiona Macleod—"Pharais." It chanced, too, that on this particular day certain other friends were staying in the house, who were interested to see Grant Allen use his typewriter. Some five of us gathered round him as he sat down to it. "Well," he said, "what shall I write? Oh, I might as well write that review"—and off he went, and in something like ten minutes he had written five hundred bright pointed words, for which Miss Fiona Macleod must, I am sure, have been very grateful, and which she will no doubt admire all the more for this confession of their true authorship. Perhaps I may be allowed to add, as a journalist who has still to go on earning many loaves, that reviews signed by my name are not usually written by any one more distinguished than myself. But I recalled this incident only to illustrate Grant Allen's capacity for working brilliantly under all circumstances. There were we five people bending over him, but he thought absolutely nothing about us. He was busy with "the Celtic movement," and something he wanted to say about it. We were hardly phantasmagoria.

So I come to the man himself, to the personal loss. That loss needs an elegy for its expression. Nowadays we write our elegies in the form of hurried leading articles, and perhaps such a column of valedictory prose as Mr. Lang's column in the "Daily News" is a more real expression of loss than that artistic sorrow remembered in tranquillity which

elaborates an "In Memoriam." When the wreath is so magnificent, one is apt to forget our sorrow in our æsthetic self-gratulation over our wreath.

Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his funeral oration, laid stress, over and over again, as I was glad to note, on two elements of Grant Allen's character,—his courage and his "militant sincerity." Yes, the courage hidden in that frail frame of his was almost pathetic; and he was certainly the sincerest man I have ever known. He possessed the simple truthfulness of genius, and perhaps one might say more particularly, of scientific genius. It is the business of the man of science to tell the truth; it is his *raison d'être*. He is so concerned to "find out" that he never conceives that there can be any necessity to conceal. That is why he so often shocks his fellows—in the pure innocence of discovery. I don't think, as I have said elsewhere, that Grant Allen ever had an *arrière pensée* in his life. He never realized the necessity of the social lie, or any other form of dissimulation. Some of us more worldly-wise, and thus on a lower level than he, would sometimes protest, on his own behalf, against his extreme open-mindedness on such matters as the commercial disabilities of telling the truth. He was, of course, in the main a financial success, but there was a brief period after "The Woman Who Did" when publishers and editors fought shy of him; and during that period he would confide to any afternoon caller, with perfect simplicity, and not the smallest sense of "martyrdom," that he stood idle in the market-place, because no one dared to hire him. I have heard him say frankly to a certain young writer, during an interchange of "shop": "Why, I never received so much for a novel in my life!" Yet he was very well paid, as literary payment goes. Any one who cares can share his printed confidences in this matter, and enjoy an excellent example of his style in his old "Idler" article on "My First Book," since reprinted, with other confessions, by Messrs. Chatto & Windus. It ends with this now-famous advice: "Don't take to literature if you've capital enough in hand to buy a good broom, and energy enough to annex a vacant crossing."

Grant Allen was too great to tell lies, even white lies. He never realized the necessity. He could compromise to the extent of doing brilliantly the work he hated, but more he would not do. No necessity, no torture, would have persuaded him to deny, or suppress, the truth that was in him. He might write of something else, but, whenever he was obliged to write of vital matters, whatever it cost him, he told the truth.

Also, he was, I think, the most completely "emancipated" of any recent English mind expressing itself in literature. I never observed a trace of that succumbing to the inherited habits of thought and feeling which even the most "advanced" thinkers have developed towards the close of life. He was entirely devoid of any form of "superstition." His reason was, to the last, master of the house of life. Perhaps he saw a little too clearly, for, as his most famous *protégée* writes:

They see not clearliest
Who see all things clear.

Perhaps Grant Allen too confidently set up Darwin and Mr. Herbert Spencer in the place of his lost Hebrew prophets. There is, as I said above, something mystic in human life that he refused to consider. With the presumptuous flamboyance of youth I sometimes told him so. Yet, at the same time, no one had such an overwhelming cosmic sense of the wonder of the universe. His wonder in presence of that appalling spectacle perhaps dwarfed his appreciation of the greater mystery of the soul of man. The brilliant organization of the universe, perhaps, a little distracted him from the human miracle. I wish I could have borrowed his phonographic memory to record a spoken rhapsody of his of the wonder, not of the world, but of the worlds, gently directed at me one evening in answer to some absurd boyish criticism of his way of thought. I remember it only as music—as I remember most of his talk.

And what an amazing talker he was! No pose-talk, but talk easily born of his knowledge and love of the subject that at the moment occupied him. No more brilliant generalizer

He can ever have lived. Present him with the most unexpected fact, or the most complex set of circumstances (as it might seem to you), and he had his theory in an instant, and was making it as clear, by the aid of his marvellously copious and exact vocabulary, as though he had drawn it on the air. And bright things by the score all the way! His gift of stating the most intricate matter impromptu in a few simple words, and of pouring out the most varied and profound learning as though he were telling a fairy tale, can hardly have been equalled, and certainly can never have been surpassed.

Well, we shall "look it up in Grant" no more. The swallows he loved to see flying in and out from the eaves of his beautiful house at Hindhead will come back, but he will come back no more. The nightjar, his favorite bird, will perch near the windows at twilight with its hoarse, sad, churring cry, but Grant Allen will hear it no more. All the goodness, the humor, the tenderness, the imagination, the intellect, the brilliance, the love and laughter that were Grant Allen are now a little dust.

At his funeral I had in my pocket his little volume of poems, and, as we turned away from the sad place where we had left him, two of his beautiful lines were murmuring in my mind:

Perchance a little light will come with morning;
Perchance I shall but sleep.

Perchance!